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ABSTRACT

A program developed at Hunter College of the City University of New York is designed to help handicapped students make a successful transition from school to work. The program provides students with unsubsidized short-term employment in the business sector and allows them to develop appropriate work habits and skills. Six program components are discussed: (1) assessment, (2) job preparation (environmental factors, work site accessibility, and interview skills); (3) job development and placement; (4) followup (post-placement services on individual and group basis); (5) counseling and resource linkage; and (6) life skills seminars (monthly meetings to address life skills issues such as money management, computers, fitness and stress management). Examples of two students who participated in the program are cited. (CL)

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A JTPA SCHOOL TO WORK TRANSITION PROGRAM FOR DISABLED UNIVERSITY STUDENTS*

FOR

"A NATIONAL CONFERENCE ON SECONDARY,
TRANSITIONAL, AND POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION FOR EXCEPTIONAL YOUTH"

SPONSORED BY

THE COUNCIL FOR EXCEPTIONAL CHILDREN
AND THE NORTHEAST REGIONAL RESOURCE CENTER

BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS

MARCH 8, 1985

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Each year approximately 20,000 to 30,000 severely disabled students leave public special education programs. Many face bleak employment futures. Even though an increasing number of these students are now entering college, a high jobless rate remains. There are several reasons for this:

- lack of preparation for the "real world" including little or no exposure to, or planning for, the work world;
- nonintegrated support systems - systems that are necessary to ensure that entry into the labor market will be successfully sustained;
- the absence of a sense of personal responsibility, a basic necessity for successful entry into the primary labor market;
- lack of expectations on the part of family, teachers, and health service delivery personnel which in turn leads to low self-esteem, relative to meaningful participation in the mainstream of society. "It's easier", said a disabled student in an interview, "to pity us than give us the tools we need to get ready for the world".

Federal legislation, such as the Vocational Rehabilitation Act 1973 and Public Law 94-142, has created more opportunity for disabled people to participate in society. However, in order for them to benefit from these more readily available opportunities, relevant and adequate preparation has to start early.

To provide disabled students in the CUNY System with the necessary tools to facilitate employment and independence, a program was developed at Hunter College of the City University of New York to assist students make a success-

ful transition from school to work. Funded by New York State Department of Education under the Job Training and Partnership Act, the program is multi-faceted. Its major thrust is to provide students with unsubsidized short-term employment in the business sector as well as to develop systems and skills needed to cope with the realities of life situations.

Recruitment is accomplished by referrals from the coordinators of disabled students on individual campuses, personal visits by program staff to campuses, or self-referral.

Eligibility criteria for the program are:

- enrollment in one of the CUNY Colleges
- physically disabled who are independent during a work day
- visually or hearing impaired.

The original plan was to include only the orthopedically physically disabled, however, because of "popular demand", this was extended to encompass the visually and hearing impaired.

Minimal documentation is required to enroll. The program requests medical approval and college transcripts when appropriate. For certification, federal legislation requires documentation for proof of age, residence, disability, income and citizenship.

All students receive an initial intake interview. Eligibility for the program is established during this interview. Issues are explored and short-term goal-setting takes place. These issues can run the gamut from

scheduling participation in the program to accommodate individual academic timetables, to examining benefit options or special transportation needs. During the intake interview, the students and the Rehabilitation Counselor review the program's components. The students select the components, cafeteria style, sequencing according to what is most meaningful to them. For example, students may choose to initiate their participation by attending a seminar on work disincentives before the skills assessment component because their benefits are of first concern. As the students move from component to component they are virtually formulating their own individualized or customized program. This opportunity to choose and sequence in order of priority is in itself a learning experience for decision-making and setting priorities. It also encourages a sense of responsibility and control.

COMPONENTS:

The program offers six components:

ASSESSMENT

- Work habits - punctuality, etc.
- Work skills - clerical, etc.
- Functional skills - adapting work site to physical limitations.

Assessment enables students:

1) To evaluate themselves in relation to a work setting i.e. endurance, productivity, physical independence, organizational skills.
2) To develop a skills-base for employment.

3) To develop job choice.

4) To identify adaptive equipment for job performance.

Assessment is accomplished through:

1) The use of standardized tests (e.g. Minnesota Clerical Test). Tests are modified for specific disability, e.g. use of large print for visually impaired.

2) Work samples.

3) Aptitude tests (e.g. programming)

4) Work exposures which provide students with the opportunities

   a) to explore routes that lead towards career objectives;

   b) to observe performance of jobs and equipment necessary to perform the job, in a variety of settings;

   c) to speak with people performing these jobs;

   d) to learn about the courses of study necessary for career objectives, and conversely to learn more about the application of academic fields of study to the business world.

Assessment of equipment modification is carried out simultaneously with skills evaluation, e.g. modification for pick up and dialing of phone.

JOB PREPARATION

To acquaint students with demands of the work world,

as well as assisting them acquire skills necessary for employment interviews.

Negotiating Environmental Factors:

Special transportation

Personal care needs

These factors are reviewed individually with each student, options are explored, problem-solving techniques developed, and linkages with community resources are made.

Work Site Accessibility

Assessment of work site for barrier free design, and job analysis.

Interview Skills Training

1) Construction of esume
2) Disability related issues (addressing these issues in an interview)
3) Trial interviews and feedback

JOB DEVELOPMENT AND PLACEMENT

Goals of the placement component are to:

1) Demonstrate employability of students, to faculty, employers and to the students themselves.
2) Confirm vocational choice or point to different direction.
3) Facilitate school to work transition and ensure initial successful foothold in the primary labor market.

Through the Project's Advisory Board and job development efforts, students are introduced to work in the business sector. Students are referred for job interviews and are placed in job as close as possible to their vocational choice. The salary is wholly paid by the employer.

The work site then becomes the classroom and for the period of employment the students learn first-hand about: productivity, interpersonal skills, supervisory demands, attendance and punctuality. Period of employment generally extends for 8-10 weeks.

During placement, students and employers receive close follow-up services to prevent and alleviate problems.

FOLLOW-UP

Post-Placement Services - on individual and group basis.

Objectives:

To provide an opportunity for students to review their work experience.

To discuss the benefits of the program, share experiences and solutions to problems with other program participants.

To make recommendations.

To provide a forum for ongoing discussion of issues still to be resolved. For example, after a trial period

of mode of transportation, a student discovers the need to explore alternate systems.

COUNSELING AND RESOURCE LINKAGE

Objectives:

1) To enable students to bring together the pieces of the program into an integrated whole and develop resource linkage.
2) To provide a support system which will enable students to initiate and maintain their participation in the labor market.

Counseling occurs throughout the students' participation in the program, from the initial interview through placement and follow-up. These sessions focus on job related, environmental and personal issues which may have an impact on achieving vocational goals. In keeping with the customized approach to the program, counseling is conducted on an individual basis and emphasizes the acquisition of problem-solving skills. After exploring a variety of alternatives available, students select an option in their goal planning. For one student this may mean exploring transportation options available to disabled individuals, while for another it may mean undertaking a time management assignment to increase responsibility.

A critical aspect of support system development is

the creation of linkages with community resources such as service providers, governmental agencies or programs which will facilitate students' participation in employment. The objective here is to introduce these resources to the student, review eligibility criteria for these programs and provide students with skills in service system negotiation. These two component parts allow the students the opportunity to develop a personal framework supporting their employment now and in the future.

Topics addressed include:

- Career/Vocational planning
- Transportation options
- Time management
- Individual benefits counseling
- Adaptive equipment
- Self advocacy skills
- Systems negotiation

LIFE SKILLS SEMINAR SERIES

These are group seminars for the integration of disabled college students into the work world and the community.

In response to student needs, a monthly seminar series has been developed to address life skills issues needed by students in preparing for the transition from school to employment.

Faculty for this series is drawn from the project's Advisory Board, and business and community resources.

Seminar I - Personal Banking and Budgeting

Faculty: Bank Representative

Objectives:

1) To teach principles of personal financial management.
2) To assist students to evaluate and choose a bank with suitable services.
3) To give students an awareness of a banking institution as a community service responding to community needs.
4) Assist students in developing an individual budget, to be utilized as an ongoing life skill..

Seminar II - Computers and Adaptations

Faculty: Rehabilitation Engineer

Objectives:

1) To demonstrate to students that computers can increase ability and capability.
2) Demonstrate variety of computer usage.
3) Introduce concept of computer adaption for persons with physical and/or sensory impairments.

Seminar III - Work Disincentive Solutions

Faculty: Project Staff

Benefits Advocates

Objectives:

1) To review factors contributing to financial disincentives to work for disabled persons receiving public benefits.
2) Acquaint students with enabling legislation to facilitate entry to employment by people with disabilities.
3) Develop problem-solving strategies and alternatives with students.
4) Provide resource information on benefits advisement (e.g. independent living centers).

Seminar IV - Fitness, Stress Management and Adapted Sports

Faculty: All 5 instructors are disabled, some are wheelchair athletes, some independent living center staff.

Objectives:

1) To introduce people with disabilities to responsibility for personal health, nutrition, and relaxation techniques.
2) Develop recreation and socialization opportunities in order to improve quality of life.
3) To demonstrate a variety of sports fast becoming available to, and performed by, people with disabilities, e.g. wheelchair tennis, slalom, and table tennis.

Seminar V - How to Research a Career

Faculty: Career Counselor, from leading graduate school of Business Administration.

Objectives:

1) To teach students self-assessment techniques.
2) Methods of researching resources for investigating career paths.

Seminar VI - Employment Opportunities After College; A Seminar for College Placement Officers, Advisors and Faculty.

Faculty: Moderator, disabled member of Advisory Board
3 corporate representatives
3 disabled professionals

Objectives:

1) To increase the awareness of college personnel of the potential of students with disabilities.
2) To heighten the expectations of college personnel vis a vis this population.
3) To provide a forum for discussion and sharing of concerns.

A panel of employers and disabled people employed shared respective points of view on recruitment, hiring and promotion of disabled people. Topics discussed were:

a) Bridging the academic and work worlds.
b) College recruitment - the role of the college and corporation.
c) Corporate responsiveness.

The following examples demonstrate the progress of two students through the program:

Jack, self referred,is a third year student majoring in Computer Science, and who is severely disabled as a result of cerebral palsy. He is a wheelchair user and has a severe speech impairment. He had been working at home as a programmer for his father's business and developed confidence about his programming skills. When he came to the program he had never worked in a regular work setting. He assumed that he could not do so. He thought that people with disabilities to the degree of severity of his own could not afford the cost of transporting themselves to work, and he was unsure of his capacity to spend extended hours outside his home on a daily basis. His own goal was homebound employment.

The first issue to be addressed was transportation. He was introduced to the fact that severely mobility impaired people do go out to work and can solve the transportation problem through one of several strategies. Transportation solutions for both participation in the project and for the long-term were explored. Since he was ineligible for some of the federally sponsored programs, purchasing a van and researching sources for financing adaptations and hiring a driver were explored. Utilization of accessible public transportation was also explored and the various advantages and limitations were carefully evaluated. Once introduced to these strategies, he became aware of options.

In providing Jack with these alternatives for the long-term, he was encouraged to participate in the program. Aware of new possibilities and more ready to consider summer employment, he then selected skills assess-

ment to confirm his computer competencies. Jack moved through this rapidly. Next he chose to attend a seminar on computers and adaptations presented by a rehabilitation engineer with computer expertise. Jack then selected interview preparation and resume writing, realizing that his opportunity for placement was now possible. He spent the longest period of time in this component. He learned how to present himself and his employment objective as well as help the interviewer understand his speech. This was accomplished by counseling, presenting hypothetical situations for him to solve, role play, and extended rehearsals.

Through practice sessions with the staff, Jack's interviewing skills were improved, and job development was initated by the Project Associate simultaneously. When he finally presented himself at a corporate interview he did well and was hired. He worked for ten weeks as a programmer. During this period both he and his employer were visited by program staff. At the close of his placement Jack received an outstanding evaluation and has been invited to return.

This example demonstrates a process for assistance in which specific interventions allowed the student to pursue wider career options. As a result of this process and intervention, Jack was able to explore new environments as an independent and productive citizen.

Components of Jack's preparation period were:

* Option development - for transportation resources and alternatives
* Benefits review - for systems eligibility

* Seminar series - for computer adaptations
* Assessment - for confirmation of skills level
* Job Preparation - for self-presentation
* Provider Systems negotiating - for obtaining necessary rehabilitation services
* Placement & Follow-up for establishment of a strong foothold in the work world.

The provision of this support network and the work experience had the comprehensive effect of positively impacting Jack's attitude of self. He now sees himself as moving from a homebound status to one of active participation in the primary labor market.

Jane is a junior majoring in Business Administration/Personnel Management. Although severely limited in both upper and lower extremities, she maintains her own apartment utilizing several hours daily of attendant care assistance. She is an SSI recipient and receives school sponsorship from the State rehabilitation agency. Self-referred, Jane sees herself as going out to work after graduation and knows that other disabled people similiar to herself have accomplished this. However, she lacks family and counselor support for this objective. Through her own efforts she has been pursuing work exposures on her own campus to test her work tolerance and develop a capacity to meet the demands of the work world.

Jane initiated her participation in the program by selecting a seminar on work disincentives solutions. She then sought advice from the program staff about the development of a self-support plan both to protect her

benefits and save for the purchase of a vehicle. She also requested assistance in establishing contact with an independent living center to pursue a different attendant care system to enable her to accept employment. Jane is presently in our program and is about to begin the assessment of work-related and functional skills as well as adaptive equipment. Prior to her job preparation activities, she will be introduced to work trials on campus as part of her skills assessment. Some of her work trials will be in a personnel office, observing personnel functions, to introduce her to the range of careers in personnel management. She will also learn time-management skills to enable her to utilize her time efficiently and save energy by learning to schedule carefully, organize materials for performing tasks, and planning ahead.

In addition to benefits review, skills assessment, information gathering through seminars, and provider systems negotiating, interventions by program staff will include linkage with, and utilization of, consumer community resources, particularly an independent living center. There will also be opportunities for Jane to become acquainted with options within her career choice to enable her to make decisions based on knowledge, practice, and observation.

It is Jane's expectation to participate in a short term paid work experience in the summer. It is also her expectation to confirm for herself, and to demonstrate to others, that she can indeed work.

It must be noted here that Jack and Jane are fortunate to have career objectives established, although at different stages in their career planning.

Many students do not have career objectives in mind, and furthermore do not know how to relate their academic major to employment. They do not know where they are going or what it takes to get there.

The program staff has begun to work with this group by introducing concentrated individual vocational guidance sessions and a series of orientation-to-work sessions. Although these students are far from being "marketable" now, it is expected that as a result of this concentrated specialized effort they will reach a level necessary to obtain a work experience.

Program Design

Organizing this program has involved:

1) Establishing mutual communication between the program staff and the individual campuses. This has been accomplished through direct contact, personal visits, meetings with staffs from several campuses, as well as through the CUNY Committee for Coordinators of Disabled Students. Maintaining regular communication with campuses is particularly beneficial for the students, their advisors and faculty.

2) Designing a reporting system to maintain full and accurate case notes, and to record student activities and progress, as well as staff activities.

The reporting system required by J.T.P.A. is mainly statistical and is uniform for all their projects. Unfortunately, this leaves no room for meaningful reporting of individual programs, their diversity and achievements.

3) Planning program activities to coincide with semester-cycles so that recruitment, referral and program participation can be arranged to accommodate school schedules. However, government funding is not always timely, resulting in programmatic delays.

Job Development & Placement - The Process

Traditionally, the process of job development and placement has been perceived as problematic. It is generally believed that it is hard to make contact with employers and interest them enough in a target population, particularly a disabled population, to hire them.

The standard approach over time has been first to prepare program participants in a vacuum for some type of employment and then contact employers hoping to find a few "kind hearted souls" who will take a chance or give someone a chance. This has led to limited success. Through this approach there is an absence of mutual communication and development of understanding, and the world of rehabilitation and the world of employers remain very separate.

The key to the placement success of this program is the process of bringing the two worlds closer together. This is accomplished in a number of ways. Firstly, the establishment of an effective Advisory Board is very important. Its effectiveness depends on its mix of members which must include decision-making representatives from corporations, as well as representatives from community resources meaningful for the program.

Appropriate college faculty are also members of this Program's Board. This membership mix enables a strong link to be forged with the employment community and agency systems.

The business representatives in particular are invited to act as advisors, seminar faculty, as evaluators and practice interviewers. These activities not only ensure that students are being adequately prepared to meet employer standards, but, equally as important, they provide a variety of forums for employers to learn about the program in depth, become better informed about the population being serviced, and become acquainted with these students on a one to one and group basis. Although meetings are held regularly, Board members are always available to staff for consultation. They are regarded as a very essential program ingredient.

In addition to the Board, parallel with student preparation, program staff calls on a variety of employers appropriate for the types of jobs being developed. Meetings are requested with the employer to describe the design and objectives of the program, to explore the availability of the specific job or jobs being sought, as well as to evaluate the job sites and to discern if the company and the student would be compatible. These meetings are utilized as educational and informational sessions, for an opportunity to become mutually acquainted, to learn about the company's interviewing and testing procedures, and to determine the degree of employer interest initially. Follow-up calls are made and invitations to program activities are extended to interested employers to begin to solidify the "budding" relationship. To maintain their interest these

employers are also consulted on a variety of employment issues such as job requirement, career paths, and labor market trends.

As jobs become available program staff are now in a position to make appropriate referrals, to inform students adequately about the company, its style and demands, and indeed what to anticipate.

So far, students have been placed in banks, utilities, transportation and international trade, and the Internal Revenue Service. Their jobs range from customer service assistant and library assistant to engineering technician and computer programmer. In most cases the placement is as relevant to the student's vocational objective as possible. In some instances this could not be accomplished because the student did not have sufficient background to be considered by an employer for work in a stated career choice. Rather, it was more important for these students to select a work experience in the primary labor market whereby they could ascertain their ability to work, to sustain a full day and a full week, and to utilize the basic skills they possessed by applying them in a real work setting.

The philosophy of the Hunter College Work Experience Program for Disabled Students reflects a contemporary approach to opportunity for the disabled consumer. Preparation towards social and economic independence, as well as self-recognition of potential is reached through practical knowledge of resources and life skills, through employment exposure, and through the development of alternative strategies. These form as effective arsenal for entering and successfully sustaining a place in society's mainstream.